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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/AFR MARY LANGE

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SUBJECT: REFUGEE SERVICES IN MALAWI: AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

¶1. SUMMARY. The 2004 Ambassador's Fund for Refugees grant is currently being implemented in Malawi, despite several obstacles and an uncertain future for refugee services in the country. The closure of one of Malawi's two camps and even a possible cessation of services for Rwandese refugees are looming on the horizon. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The 2004 Ambassador's Fund for Refugees grantee, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), has completed several elements of their 2004 project. Two computers have been purchased for a Dzaleka camp learning center, and qualified teachers are currently providing computer skills training to young women. These classes have been extremely popular, and will soon be made available to a group of young men as well. JRS has also purchased science equipment and several thousand textbooks for a local secondary school utilized by refugees.

¶3. While JRS has made good progress in completing their project as proposed, they have run into some formidable obstacles. One element of the project is the construction a school block at the newly re-opened Luwani camp; however, talk of camp closure and a possible cessation of services for Rwandese (the largest group of refugees in Malawi) are cause for hesitation. So far, no school construction is underway.

¶4. UNHCR and GOM officials remain unsure - or at least tight-lipped - about which of the two camps will remain open. A camp administrator told PolOff on May 13 that the GOM is now complaining about problems of land and water usage at Luwani camp, which was re-opened in late 2003. (NOTE: At that time, UNHCR insisted that Luwani's opening was essential due to the limited space for farming and crowded conditions at Dzaleka. Prior to re-opening Luwani, UNHCR said the areas surrounding the camp - which had previously housed in excess of 200,000 Mozambican refugees - were readily available for refugees' usage. END NOTE) The administrator added that new arrivals to Malawi often refuse to go to Luwani, citing poor living and agricultural conditions there as well as the camp's remote location. He noted that the GOM's preference is to expand Luwani and close Dzaleka completely, though he did not think UNHCR would agree. A cessation of services to Rwandese, apparently under consideration since the 2003 tripartite repatriation agreement, had been scheduled to occur in late 2005, but now appears to have been postponed until at least ¶2006.

¶5. COMMENT. JRS has made reasonable, good faith efforts to uphold its grant agreement with the USG. Unfortunately, these efforts have been slowed due to inefficiencies in the UNHCR/GOM decision-making process. Consolidation of the two camps appears to be a logical idea, however deciding which camp to close may be more difficult than the GOM and UNHCR would like. Malawi's looming food crisis and continued severe poverty make refugee services and land usage sensitive issues. A cessation of services for Rwandese, while unlikely in the immediate future, does not seem to be out of the question.

GILMOUR